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ABSTRACT

The celebration of International Book Year in 1972 provided an impetus to increasing the number of people who read throughout the world. Four themes for that program were the promotion of the reading habit, development of book production and distribution, promotion of books in the service of education and peace, and encouragement of authorship and translation. It was a year for stocktaking and for analyzing three interrelated factors: literacy, availability of books, and extent of readership among the literate population. The studies that were carried out revealed that the absolute number of illiterates has continued to increase, that books are not uniformly available throughout the world, and that there are 600 million nonreaders among the literate population. In evaluating the year, the General Conference of UNESCO, the sponsoring agency, decided to maintain the initiative with a long-term program of action at the national, regional, and international levels and to retain the four original themes. Promotion of reading remains one of the foremost objectives and is dealt with in three major ways: instilling love for books, conducting studies of books and reading, and bringing books to the public. At the international level, the International Reading Association is playing a vital role in promoting readership. (TJ)

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BOOKS FOR ALL

International Cooperation for Reading Promotion

Any attempt to assess the impact of international cooperation on the encouragement of readership might well take 1972 as the point of departure. That was the year proclaimed by Unesco as International Book Year, and the momentum generated during that 12-month period continues to be a decisive factor in book and reading promotion.

From its inception, International Book Year elicited astonishing support. Under the slogan "Books for All," national plans were drawn up and carried out in some 130 countries, 60 of which set up special national committees for the purpose. International, regional and national book fairs were organized. Posters, stamps and special publications commemorated the event. The mass media provided unprecedented coverage on books. Library legislation was enacted for the first time in many countries and national bibliographic services were initiated. One developing country put into effect a plan for creating 50,000 libraries and reading rooms; another initiated the free distribution of textbooks; and a third started a special book delivery circuit via helicopter and muleback to inaccessible outlying communities. National publishing houses sprang into being and books flowed across frontiers with new freedom.

Of all the results achieved by International Book Year, however, none was more striking than the impetus the event gave to readership. One

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country, France, had indeed proposed at Unesco that 1972 should be International Book and Reading Year, and although the title was shortened, readership remained a keynote. Promotion of the reading habit was one of the four themes decided on by Unesco for the Year - the others being development of book production and distribution, books in the service of education and peace, and encouragement of authorship and translation. Not only governments but professional organizations as well put readership in the forefront. Thus, when the international book community - publishers, librarians, authors and booksellers - adopted a Charter of the Book, the first of the ten Articles was: "Everyone has the right to read". (The Charter was ratified by the Delegates Assembly of the International Reading Association in 1974.)

What exactly was done during International Book Year to promote the reading habit? It may be instructive to give some examples, which can perhaps also help to define the very concept of reading promotion.

One of the most direct initiatives, which caught hold increasingly as the Year progressed, was the carrying out of national readership surveys. Country after country, developing and developed alike, took the occasion of Book Year to conduct nationwide enquiries into the pattern of readership. Under the aegis of universities, research institutes or book development councils, these scientific investigations were designed to determine the country's reading pattern. Answers were sought to questions such as: how many books do people read per year and what kind; the relationship between book, magazine and newspaper readership; the degree of lapse into illiteracy; and the characteristic reading habits of different age groups. In the light of the findings, education authorities, the publishing industry and others concerned in the country were better equipped to formulate policies for the

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improvement of readership as part of the program for economic and social development. To cite this as one example of the abiding effects of the 1972 commemoration, it is to be noted that subsequently a number of countries have continued to conduct these national readership surveys periodically.

In addition to surveys and other research initiatives, a great many promotional activities and devices were designed in one way or another to encourage book buying and readership. Some examples:

- In addition to the international motto "Books for All", individual countries and local groups adopted slogans of their own. "Reading for All," "Read More - Guess Less," "Widen Your World with Books," "Books Bring People Together" - these are but a few examples. In some countries the slogans were broadcast several times a day on radio and television, were printed on T-shirts and became the captions on posters.

- A number of organizations, ranging from trade unions to businessmen's groups, participated in a gift-to-schools movement. Other book gift devices abounded. One country, during the whole of 1972, offered each newly-married couple six books of their choice as a spur to home libraries.

- Commercial companies contributed advertising space for book news while authors were given unusual opportunities to reach potential readers through special radio and television programs.

- Of particular note is that school systems during 1972 evolved a variety of imaginative techniques, or gave greater currency to old ones, for encouraging readership. Schoolchildren were encouraged to produce books on their own; "reading passports" were introduced; classroom book festivals provided opportunities for young readers to meet authors, take part in contests and listen to performances by teams of storytellers. Parenthetically, these and countless other techniques for encouraging

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children to read are topical right now as preparations are being made for the celebration, in 1979, of the International Year of the Child, in which the promotion of books for children promises to be one of the main features.

Apart from the results it achieved, International Book Year proved to be a time for reflection on the place of books in our society. Individual citizens across the globe reacted to the commemoration of The Book with such fervor that it was almost like the rediscovery of an old friend. They joined with the scholars and the professional community in asking searching questions about the situation of books in the world today.

Thus, 1972 was a year for stock-taking. It became quickly apparent that any examination in depth would be a composite of at least three inter-related factors: first of all, literacy, because the ability to read is a manifest prerequisite; secondly, the availability of books; and, thirdly, the extent of readership on the part of the literate population. All three points were examined - let us look at the world picture that emerged.

As to literacy, despite the progress made in certain countries, the absolute total of illiterates has continued to increase. The number is estimated at no less than 800 million persons. The staggering fact is that one adult in three cannot read or write. It is also significant to note, particularly in this audience keenly concerned with women's rights, that the number of women illiterates is increasing more rapidly than that of men and makes up 60 per cent of the world's illiterate population. Inevitably, illiteracy is most acute in the poorer countries where in some cases as much as 80 per cent of the population cannot read or write. In many of these nations it is the young people who make up a large number of the illiterates, and this situation seems to be worsening. Unesco predicts

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that by 1985 the number of children in the developing countries between the ages of 6 and 11 who are not attending school will total some 134 million, of whom 90 million will be in Asia alone. A concomitant factor is that even among the children who are enrolled very few remain until the completion of primary education. Thus, population may be expected to outstrip school enrolment in the developing regions for many years to come unless the international community takes drastic action to reverse the present depressing trend.

Turning now to the availability of books, the studies carried out in 1972 pointed to the stark conclusion that, as regards access to the printed word, 70 per cent of the world's population is underdeveloped. Thirty-four countries, representing only 30 per cent of the population, account for 81 per cent of the world's books. All the other countries - some 70 per cent of the population - together produced only 19 per cent of the titles. A regional breakdown of these figures showed that Europe, for example, with 13 per cent of the world population, produced 45 per cent of the books, while Asia, with 56 per cent of the population, accounted for only 20 per cent. Africa presented the grimmest picture: 75 per cent of the books sold came from other continents; yet, despite costly imports, the number of books available was estimated to be less than half the minimum needs.

The book hunger of the developing countries persists despite the magnificent prospects offered by new techniques for the mass production and distribution of books. It will be a commonplace for almost all of us gathered here today that the paperback revolution, in which some editions are distributed in millions of copies, has transformed the publishing industry in the four decades since Allen Lane in Great Britain first issued his Penguins. But are all of us fully aware of the extent of the transformation? One

statistic tells the story: in the past 20 years the number of titles of books produced throughout the world has doubled and the number of copies has tripled. Translated into more precise figures: in 1971, world book production amounted to some 500,000 titles a year and the number of copies came to 7,000 to 8,000 million. Yet, during this same 20-year period, the figures for the developing countries showed no increase. Thus, the "book gap" as it is sometimes called, threatens to become a veritable chasm if the present trend persists.

In addition to these physical disparities, there is also the problem of content. Despite their overriding need for technical books, for example, the developing countries give less attention to this category than do the world publishing giants. Meetings held under Unesco's auspices have defined three kinds of books to which priority attention should be given for the future. The first comprises educational books, including those for the classroom, for the university and for lifelong education. The second category is made up of the vast field of children's books, to which, fortunately, the developing countries these days seem to be devoting more and more time and resources. The third sector, which is the least easy to define, covers general reading matter for adults - those, alike, who have reached a high level of education and those who are newly literate but, above all, the latter who must be provided with functional easy-to-read books to avert a lapse into illiteracy.

Now we come to the third - and for the International Reading Association, most
the/germane - factor, which is the extent of readership among the literate population. A Unesco publication for International Book Year begins its chapter on "Promotion of the Reading Habit" with the comment that, in addition to the more than 800 million illiterates, "the literate population

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includes some 600 million non-readers so that a considerable mass of human beings is condemned to stagnation." The study goes on to cite some startling examples drawn not from the Third World but from Western Europe. A survey in Italy discloses that out of 400 persons in all social strata, 31 had never read a book and 129 no longer did; in other words, 40 per cent were non-readers. Another survey carried out among a much larger sample in Hungary showed 39.4 per cent of non-readers. The author of the Unesco publication, a Frenchman, cites finally the result of a study conducted in his own country, disclosing that 53 per cent of some 7,000 adults questioned never, or hardly ever, read a book - a score which, he says,"shocked French opinion at the time." The survey in France had an interesting incidental statistic: the proportion of non-readers among the 15 to 19 age bracket was only a fourth of that for the population as a whole. In other words, lack of interest in reading was not so common in youth. That conclusion was confirmed by another survey, in Switzerland, which turned up only 7 per cent of non-readers among young army recruits.

The diverse studies carried out during International Book Year thus drew a variety of conclusions about the pattern of reading. But on one point all were agreed - the promotion of readership constituted a challenge no less daunting than that presented by illiteracy and the book hunger.

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A report submitted to the General Conference of Unesco at the end of 1972 contained an account, on the one hand, of the unsatisfactory worldwide situation of books and reading, and, on the other, of the attack on the problem that had been initiated with International Book Year. In the light of that report, Unesco took the unanimous decision to maintain the initiative with a long-term program of action. The four themes mentioned earlier were retained and so, too, was the overall objective of "Books for All." These

were embodied in a brochure setting forth, under each theme, specific suggestions for action addressed to to Governments, to professional organizations and to book-minded people the world over.

Promotion of the reading habit, therefore, remains one of the foremost objectives of Unesco's book development program. In fact, it was this aim that was singled out in the resolution adopted by the General Conference launching the long-term program of action. The resolution drew attention to "the general preoccupation with the promotion of the reading habit and the need to synthesize the considerable body of research already carried out in this field."

In the Unesco brochure, the section on the promotion of reading lists suggestions under three headings. The first is "instilling love for books". Under this point, the suggestions include: provision of special training for teachers of reading in primary and secondary schools; creation of reading incentives by means of devices such as "reading passports"; establishment of reading clubs or other cooperative school ventures; distribution of moderate-priced newspapers or information bulletins for pupils; giving books as end-of-year prizes; and establishment of reading groups at the village or urban district level. The second group of suggestions, headed "learning more about books and reading," calls for studies of the tastes, motivations and comportment of readers; classroom research into reading motivation, using audio-visual techniques; and opportunities for students to learn more about the manufacture of books through visits to printing plants and publishing houses.

The third heading is entitled "bringing books to the public." It offers some general advice such as the production of books for new literates in easily readable type and simple language; the collection of oral

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literature; and the production and distribution of inexpensive pamphlets on health, farming or other matters of broad general interest. In addition, there are some specific pointers: organize school exhibitions on an author, character in a novel or literacy theme; draw up "book maps" of a community pinpointing bookshops and libraries; and arrange for language courses for immigrant workers, with reading material being provided in their own languages.

For the carrying out of this program, it is the Governments of Unesco's Member States that are the prime movers, since they must provide most of the resources and, often, initiate the action. On this score, it is encouraging that in recent years some 30 countries have established national book development councils which, bringing together representatives of education ministries and of the book community, serve as a spearhead for the nation's book development effort. Most of these councils include in their activities the promotion of the reading habit, and they often serve, for example, as the sponsors of national readership surveys.

In addition, to councils at the national level, Unesco's program has produced a network of regional institutions. Meetings held in all the developing regions from 1966 to 1972 resulted in the establishment of book development centres for Asia at Tokyo, for Africa at Yaoundé, for the Arab States at Cairo and for Latin America at Bogota. All the centres have inscribed the promotion of readership in their work plans. The Latin American Centre has been especially active and has already conferred with officers of the International Reading Association on activities for readership promotion in that region.

It is at the international level, however, that Book Year had the most pronounced effect on efforts to promote the reading habit. Significantly,

the Support Committee that advised and assisted Unesco on the conduct of the Year had no representative of the International Reading Association among its professional ranks. However, when it was decided to create an International Book Committee to carry forward the work accomplished in 1972, the international book community welcomed the inclusion of an IRA member. Moreover, one of the main steps taken by the Committee was to recommend the convening of an international symposium on the promotion of the reading habit, which was held in the United States in 1976, under the auspices of the Academy for Educational Development and with assistance from Unesco.

The 1976 symposium, one of the first to deal specifically with the promotion of the reading habit, resulted in a well-presented report entitled "A Reason to Read". Since the symposium enlisted the cooperation of specialists from a considerable number of countries, their recommendations - 15 in all - offer some insight into international priorities. Among the measures they called for were:

- Greater contact between directors of extracurricular reading programs and school officials, with a view to joint action for reading promotion.

- Establishment of an international system whereby materials that have proven effective in increasing reading motivation could be coded according to reading and age levels, language and content.

- Joint efforts by publishers and literacy groups to improve the design characteristics of reading materials in terms of format, color, illustrations, print and type size, paper quality, type of binding and cover presentation.

- Study of the relationship between oral traditions and reading in

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both developed and developing countries and encouragement of the use of folktales and fairy tales in inducing young people to read.

- Greater involvement of parents in library and literacy programs so as to reinforce the reading habit in the family context.

- Encouragement of reading motivation studies, under the auspices of Unesco and other international organizations, and dissemination of the results to government officials, educational administrators, teachers, parents, librarians, publishers, writers and those involved in special reading programs.

On the last point, it is to be noted that the professional organizations are not alone in according greater attention to readership promotion in general and to the International Reading Association in particular. Thus, Unesco recently commissioned the Executive Director of the International Reading Association, Dr. Ralph Staiger, to prepare a study on the promotion of the reading habit, which is to be published shortly.

The salient point which emerges, therefore, from this examination of recent trends in international cooperation is that there is, on the one hand, a growing awareness of the importance of work for the promotion of readership, and, on the other, increasing recognition of the vital role of the International Reading Association as the qualified professional organization in this field. The Association itself has been quick to respond to the challenge. Earlier this year it addressed an invitation to developing countries throughout the world suggesting that they examine the possibility of launching new readership campaigns in which the International Reading Association would undertake to serve as technical adviser. It was proposed that these campaigns might be initiated by informal national meetings bringing together representatives of the education ministry, the library network,

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the publishing industry and the news media, along with an expert from the Association itself. Such meetings might be expected to draw up plans for national readership campaigns which could perhaps be conducted during a one-year period and for which outside assistance might be sought to supplement funds from the Government and other national sources.

It is evident that international cooperation for reading promotion is a complex interdisciplinary endeavour requiring the good will of all concerned - Governments, publishers and reading specialists alike. The Charter of the Book, in the comment under Article I on "the right to read", puts it this way:

"Society has an obligation to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to enjoy the benefit of reading. Since vast portions of the world's population are deprived of access to books by inability to read, Governments have the responsibility of helping to obliterate the scourge of illiteracy. They should encourage the provision of printed materials needed to build and maintain the skill of reading. Bilateral and multilateral assistance should be made available, as required, to the book professions. The producers and distributors of books, for their part, have the obligation to ensure that the ideas and information thus conveyed continue to meet the changing needs of the reader and of society as a whole."

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